

Information on Secret Mark

In 1958, Morton Smith found a letter of Clement of Alexandria at the Mar Saba monastary near the city of Jerusalem. The Secret Gospel of Mark is known only from the references in this letter.

Although there has been some controversy over the letter, today it is generally agreed that the letter is authentic correspondence written by Clement. In his introduction in *The Complete Gospels*, Stephen Patterson notes: "The handwriting can be dated to around 1750. Smith published the letter in 1973. Early discussion of it was marred by accusations of forgery and fraud, no doubt owing in part to its controversial comments. Today, however, there is almost unanimous agreement among Clementine scholars that the letter is authentic."

Stephen Patterson gives this account of the passages noted by Clement:

The first passage is a story of how Jesus miraculously raises a young man (*neaniskos*) who has recently died, at the behest of his bereaved sister. According to Clement, the story was added to Mark between verses 10:34 and 10:35. The story bears a striking resemblance to the raising of Lazarus in the Gospel of John (John 11:1-44). However, since it shows none of the typical marks of Johannine redaction which so strongly color the story about Lazarus, it is unlikely that the Secret Mark story is directly dependent upon its Johannine parallel. For its part, the version of the story from Secret Mark has its own peculiarities not found in John, such as the initiation of the young man into the "mystery of God's domain." The basic story, however, probably derives from the common stock of miracle stories available to both Mark and John, or their sources.

The second fragment is extremely brief, but nonetheless interesting. First, it mentions Salome, who appears in the New Testament elsewhere only in Mark (see 15:40; 16:1). Secondly, when placed in the slot where Clement indicates it occurs in Secret Mark (between 10:46a: "Then they came to Jericho," and 10:46b: "As he was leaving Jericho...") it fills a well-known hole in the Markan narrative. The stop in Jericho now seems, in light of the Secret Gospel, at least a little less futile.

There is debate over the relationship between Secret Mark and canonical Mark: was Clement correct to regard Secret Mark as an expansion of canonical Mark? F. F. Bruce writes, "The 'secret' character of the additional sayings is the most obvious Gnosticizing feature. . . . [Clement and contemporaries] were willing to treat acceptable expansions as belonging to a second edition produced by Mark after his alleged coming from Rome to Alexandria, but those expansions which were manifestly Gnostic were ascribed to the school of Carpocrates." (*Jesus and Christian Origins Outside the New Testament*, p. 165-166) Gerd Theissen and Annette Merz state (*The*

Historical Jesus, p. 47): "the majority of exegetes regard the Secret Gospel as a Gnostic revision of the canonical Mark composed in the second century. This is supported by an emphasis on its 'secret' character and its use in Carpocratian circles, which evidently employed it to legitimate particular liturgical customs. Merkel explains the linguistic form of the pericope as a retelling of John 11 which borrows language from all four Gospels."

On the other hand, Helmut Koester and J.D. Crossan think that canonical Mark is derived from Secret Mark by elimination of these passages. Helmut Koester writes: "It is immediately evident that this story shows many similarities with the story of the raising of Lazarus in John 11. That it is, in fact, the same story is evident in the emphasis upon the love between Jesus and the man who was raised by him (cf. John 11:3, 5, 35-36), expressed twice in the additions of *Secret Mark*. Both stories are also located in Bethany. But it is impossible that *Secret Mark* is dependent upon John 11. In its version of the story, there are no traces of the rather extensive Johannine redaction (proper names, motif of the delay of Jesus' travel, measurement of space and time, discourses of Jesus with his disciples and with Martha and Mary). As to its form, *Secret Mark* represents a stage of development of the story that corresponds to the source used by John. The author evidently still had access to the free tradition of stories about Jesus, or perhaps to some older written collection of miracle stories." (*Ancient Christian Gospels*, p. 296) Another interesting point is that Salome is named without explanation in canonical Mark 15:40, 16:1. Clement of Alexandria quotes a reference from the Secret Gospel of Mark to "his mother and Salome," which may indicate the existence of stories including Salome in pre-canonical Mark.

Then there is the question of the relationship of Secret Mark to the original Gospel of Mark: was Secret Mark the original gospel, or was Secret Mark an expansion of the original gospel of Mark? Koester believes that Secret Mark is an expansion of the original Mark, and this makes for at least three different editions of Mark: original Mark, Secret Mark, and canonical Mark. In *The Other Gospels*, Ron Cameron takes a position similar to the one held by Koester:

Most of all, the discovery of the *Secret Gospel of Mark* has made us privy to new and unparalleled information about the various editions of the Gospel of Mark, and has brought to our attention the widespread esoteric tradition among the earliest believers in Jesus. . . the canonical (or "public") Gospel of Mark appears to be an abridgment of the *Secret Gospel of Mark*. The first edition of Mark, which was written ca. 70 C.E., is no longer extant. The *Secret Gospel of Mark* was probably composed around the beginning of the second century, most likely in Syria. Sometime thereafter our present edition of Mark, with only vestiges of the secret

tradition still visible (Mark 4:11; 9:25-27; 10:21, 32, 38-39; 12:32-34; 14:51-52), took shape.

Above we noted that Salome is mentioned in Secret Mark, and it is noteworthy that Salome is absent in the lists of women who went to the tomb in Matthew and Luke; it is possible that Matthew and Luke relied on a version of Mark without any mention of Salome. Thus, Secret Mark may be an important witness to the textual history of the Gospel of Mark.

Letter of Clement of Alexandria on Secret Mark

Translated by Morton Smith.

From the letters of the most holy Clement, the author of the Stromateis. To Theodore.

You did well in silencing the unspeakable teachings of the Carpocrations. For these are the "*wandering stars*" referred to in the prophecy, who wander from the narrow road of the commandments into a boundless abyss of the carnal and bodily sins. For, priding themselves in knowledge, as they say, "*of the deep things of Satan*", they do not know that they are casting themselves away into "*the nether world of the darkness*" of falsity, and boasting that they are free, they have become slaves of servile desires. Such men are to be opposed in all ways and altogether. For, even if they should say something true, one who loves the truth should not, even so, agree with them. For not all true things are the truth, nor should that truth which merely seems true according to human opinions be preferred to the true truth, that according to the faith.

Now of the things they keep saying about the divinely inspired Gospel according to Mark, some are altogether falsifications, and others, even if they do contain some true elements, nevertheless are not reported truly. For the true things, being mixed with inventions, are falsified, so that, as the saying goes, even the salt loses its savor.

As for Mark, then, during Peter's stay in Rome he wrote an account of the Lord's doings, not, however, declaring all of them, nor yet hinting at the secret ones, but selecting what he thought most useful for increasing the faith of those who were being instructed. But when Peter died a martyr, Mark came over to Alexandria, bringing both his own notes and those of Peter, from which he transferred to his former book the things suitable to whatever makes for progress toward knowledge. Thus he composed a more spiritual Gospel for the use of those who were being perfected. Nevertheless, he yet did not divulge the things not to be uttered, nor did he write down the hierophantic teaching of the Lord, but to the stories already written he added yet others and, moreover, brought in certain sayings of which he knew the interpretation would, as a mystagogue, lead the hearers into the innermost sanctuary of that truth hidden by seven veils. Thus, in sum, he prepared matters, neither grudgingly nor incautiously, in my opinion, and, dying, he left his composition to the church in 1, verso

Alexandria, where it even yet is most carefully guarded, being read only to those who are being initiated into the great mysteries.

But since the foul demons are always devising destruction for the race of men, Carpocrates, instructed by them and using deceitful arts, so enslaved a certain presbyter of the church in Alexandria that he got from him a copy of the secret Gospel, which he both interpreted according to his blasphemous and carnal doctrine and, moreover, polluted, mixing with the spotless and holy words utterly shameless lies. From this mixture is drawn off the teaching of the Carpocratians.

To them, therefore, as I said above, one must never give way; nor, when they put forward their falsifications, should one concede that the secret Gospel is by Mark, but should even deny it on oath. For, "*Not all true things are to be said to all men*". For this reason the Wisdom of God, through Solomon, advises, "*Answer the fool from his folly*", teaching that the light of the truth should be hidden from those who are mentally blind. Again it says, "*From him who has not shall be taken away*", and "*Let the fool walk in darkness*". But we are "*children of Light*", having been illuminated by "*the dayspring*" of the spirit of the Lord "*from on high*", and "*Where the Spirit of the Lord is*", it says, "*there is liberty*", for "*All things are pure to the pure*".

To you, therefore, I shall not hesitate to answer the questions you have asked, refuting the falsifications by the very words of the Gospel. For example, after "*And they were in the road going up to Jerusalem*" and what follows, until "*After three days he shall arise*", the secret Gospel brings the following material word for word:

"And they come into Bethany. And a certain woman whose brother had died was there. And, coming, she prostrated herself before Jesus and says to him, 'Son of David, have mercy on me.' But the disciples rebuked her. And Jesus, being angered, went off with her into the garden where the tomb was, and straightway a great cry was heard from the tomb. And going near, Jesus rolled away the stone from the door of the tomb. And straightaway, going in where the youth was, he stretched forth his hand and raised him, seizing his hand. But the youth, looking upon him, loved him and began to beseech him that he might be with him. And going out of the tomb, they came into the house of the youth, for he was rich. And after six days Jesus told him what to do, and in the evening the youth comes to him, wearing a linen cloth over his naked body. And he remained with him that night, for Jesus taught him the mystery of the Kingdom of God. And thence, arising, he returned to the other side of the Jordan."

After these words follows the text, "*And James and John come to him*", and all that section. But "*naked man with naked man*," and the other things about which you wrote, are not found.

And after the words, "*And he comes into Jericho*," the secret Gospel adds only, "*And the sister of the youth whom Jesus loved and his mother and Salome were there, and Jesus did not receive them*." But the many other things about which you wrote both seem to be, and are, falsifications.

Now the true explanation, and that which accords with the true philosophy ...

A Letter Attributed to Clement of Alexandria

To Theodore.

You did well in silencing the unspeakable teachings of the Carpocrations. For these are "wandering stars" referred to in the prophecy, who wander from the narrow road of the commandments into a boundless abyss of the carnal and bodily sins. For, priding themselves in knowledge, as they say, "of the deep things of Satan, they do not know that they are casting themselves away into "the netherworld of the darkness" of falseness, and boasting that they are free, they have become slaves of servile desires. Such men are to be opposed in all ways and altogether. For, even if they should say something true, one who loves the truth should not, even so, agree with them. For not all true things are the truth, nor should that truth which merely seems true according to human opinions be preferred to the true truth, that according to the faith.

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And these words follow the text, "*And James and John come to him*" and all that section. But "*naked man with naked man*" and the other things about which you wrote, are not found.

And after the words, "*And he comes into Jericho*," the secret Gospel adds only, "*And the sister of the youth whom Jesus loved and his mother and Salome were there, and Jesus did not receive them.*" But

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Secret Gospel of Mark

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The **Secret Gospel of Mark** refers to a [non-canonical gospel](#) which is the subject of the [Mar Saba letter](#), a previously unknown letter attributed to [Clement of Alexandria](#) which [Morton Smith](#) claimed to have found transcribed into the endpapers of a 17th century printed edition of the works of [Ignatius of Antioch](#).

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In the Mar Saba letter, the Secret Gospel of Mark is described as a second "more spiritual" version of the [Gospel of Mark](#) composed by the evangelist himself. Its purpose was supposedly to encourage knowledge (*gnosis*) among more advanced Christians, and it was said to be in use in liturgies in [Alexandria](#).^[1]

The letter includes two excerpts from the Secret Gospel. The first is to be inserted, Clement states, between what are verses 34 and 35 of Mark 10:

And they come into Bethany. And a certain woman whose brother had died was there. And, coming, she prostrated herself before Jesus and says to him, 'Son of David, have mercy on me.' But the disciples rebuked her. And Jesus, being angered, went off with her into the garden where the tomb was, and straightway a great cry was heard from the tomb. And going near Jesus rolled away the stone from the door of the tomb. And straightway, going in where the youth was, he stretched forth his hand and raised him, seizing his hand. But the youth, looking upon him, loved him and began to beseech him that he might be with him. And going out of the tomb they came into the house of the youth, for he was rich. And after six days Jesus told him what to do and in the evening the youth comes to him, wearing a linen cloth over his naked body. And he remained with him that night, for Jesus taught him the mystery of the kingdom of God. And thence, arising, he returned to the other side of the Jordan.^[21]

The second excerpt is very brief and is to be inserted, according to Clement, in Mark 10:46:

And the sister of the youth whom Jesus loved and his mother and Salome were there, and Jesus did not receive them.^[21]

While Clement endorses these two passages as authentic to the Secret Gospel of Mark, he rejects as a [Carpocratian](#) corruption the words "naked man with naked man".^[21]

Very shortly after the second excerpt, as Clement begins to explain the passages, the letter breaks off. Just before that, Clement says, "But the many other things about which you wrote both seem to be and are falsifications."^[21]

These two excerpts comprise the entirety of the Secret Gospel material. No separate text of the secret gospel is known to survive.

[edit] Lacunae and continuity

The two excerpts suggest resolutions to some puzzling passages in the canonical Mark.

[edit] The young man in the linen cloth

In Mark 14:51-52, a young man in a linen cloth is seized during Jesus' arrest, but he escapes at the cost of his clothing. This passage seems to have little to do with the rest of the narrative, and it has given cause to various interpretations. Often it is suggested that the young man is Mark himself. Some commentators believe that the boy was a stranger, who lived near the garden and, after being awakened, ran

out, half-dressed, to see what all the noise was about (vv. 46-49).^[3] W.L. Lane thinks that Mark mentioned this episode in order to make it clear that "all (not only the disciples) fled, leaving Jesus alone in the custody of the police."^[4] However these explanations are not entirely satisfactory.

The same Greek word [neaniskos](#) (young man) is used both in Secret Mark and in Mark 14:51. If we accept [Helmut Koester](#)'s theory that the canonical Mark is a revision of Secret Mark,^[5] another explanation is possible, namely, that the ancient editor who deleted an earlier encounter of Jesus with such a young man in a cloth, then added this incident also involving a young man during Jesus' arrest.

There's also one more occurrence of [neaniskos](#) in Mark, this time as a youth dressed in white at the tomb of Jesus (Mk 16:5). For this particular passage, there are also parallel passages in both Matthew and Luke, but they don't use "neaniskos". (In Mt 28:2, it is "an angel of the Lord" dressed in white that appears and, in Lk 24:4, there are *two* "men" [the Greek word is "andres"]). Thus, it is also possible that all three of these occurrences of "neaniskos" in Mark and in Secret Mark are related somehow; perhaps the same editor was at work on all three. The proponents of Secret Mark as a forgery, on the other hand, suggest that Secret Mark was created based on Mark 14:51 and 16:5.

[\[edit\]](#) **The lacuna in the trip to Jericho**

The second excerpt fills in an apparent [lacuna](#) in Mark 10:46: "They came to Jericho. As he and his disciples and a large crowd were leaving Jericho, Bartimaeus son of Timaeus, a blind beggar, was sitting by the roadside."

The lack of any action in Jericho is interpreted by some as meaning that something has been lost from the text, and the second excerpt gives a brief encounter at this point.

[Helmut Koester](#) and Ron Cameron have argued that Secret Mark preceded the canonical Mark, and that the canonical Mark is in fact an abbreviation of Secret Mark.^[6] This would explain the narrative discontinuity above. [John Dominic Crossan](#) has also been supportive of these views of Koester: "I consider that canonical Mark is a very deliberate revision of Secret Mark."^[7]

[\[edit\]](#) **Issues of authenticity**

The Secret Gospel is known only from the Mar Saba letter, which is itself only known from the copy discovered by Morton Smith. Therefore, logically, at least three important questions arise:

1. whether or not Mar Saba MS really contains a genuine letter of Clement
2. whether Clement's quotations from Secret Mark are accurate
3. whether these quotations reflect a genuine Marcan tradition

In 1982 [Morton Smith](#) summarized the state of the question as follows^[8]:

1. Attribution to Clement was accepted.
2. Clement's attribution of the excerpts to "Mark" was rejected.
3. The source of the excerpts was variously ascribed to a separate [apocryphal gospel](#), a [pastiche](#) of canonical material, or an expansion of the canonical text using early material of unknown provenance.

The authenticity of the Mar Saba letter itself has long been the subject of controversy. The manuscript and the book where it was found have disappeared; all that remains are black and white photographs made by Professor Smith in 1958, and color photographs by a librarian ca 1976-1977.^[9] Early on, some scholars tended to discount Smith's claims because, as it was believed, the copy of the letter had been seen by no scholar other than Smith. Yet, in 1976, Guy G. Stroumsa and three other scholars relocated the document.^[10] The book was subsequently taken from Mar Saba to the library of the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate in Jerusalem in 1977, where the letter (i.e. the manuscript) was cut out of the book (on the back pages of which it was inscribed) as part of the library's scheme to house such material separately.^[10] It was then photographed, by librarian Kallistos Dourvas.

The manuscript cannot now be relocated; the second photo series were only published in 2000.^[11] As of January 2009, the letter is only documented in the two sets of photographs.^[12] The ink and fiber were never subjected to examination.^[13]

The view of Secret Mark and the Mar Saba manuscript as modern forgeries was promoted after Morton Smith's death by Prof. [Jacob Neusner](#), a specialist in ancient Judaism, who is believed to be the world's most published scholar in the humanities, with more than 900 books to his name. Neusner was Morton Smith's student and admirer but, later, in 1984, there was a very public falling out between them after Smith publicly denounced his former student's academic

competence.^[14] Neusner subsequently described Secret Mark as the "forgery of the century".^[14] Yet Neusner never wrote any detailed analysis of Secret Mark, or explanation of why he thought it was a forgery.

In 2005, Stephen Carlson came out with the book *The Gospel Hoax: Morton Smith's Invention of Secret Mark*, where he spells out his case that Morton Smith, himself, was both the author and the scribe of Mar Saba manuscript.^[15] When Carlson examined the photographs supplied by Smith, he claimed to observe a "forger's tremor."^[16] Thus, according to Carlson, the letters had not actually been written at all, but drawn with shaky pen lines and with lifts of the pen in the middle of strokes. Carlson also claims that his comparisons with Morton Smith's typical rendering of Greek letters (such as in his own correspondence and notes) reveal that the unusual formation of the letters *theta* and *lambda* in Mar Saba MS matched Smith's own peculiar formation of those letters.^[17] Yet these claims by Carlson have been, in their own turn, challenged by subsequent scholarly research, especially by Scott Brown in numerous articles.^[18]

In 2001, scholar Philip Jenkins drew attention^[19] to a popular novel by James Hunter entitled *The Mystery of Mar Saba*, that first appeared in 1940.^[20] This novel presents some unusual parallels to the events associated with Mar Saba MS, that have unfolded in real life after 1958.^[21] Later, RM Price also drew attention to this novel.^[22] In 2007, musicologist Peter Jeffery also published a book accusing Morton Smith of forgery,^[23] arguing that Smith wrote the Mar Saba document with the purpose of "creat(ing) the impression that Jesus practised homosexuality".^[24]

Nevertheless, a number of academics and theologians have dismissed the allegations that Smith forged the letter, and several have tentatively concluded that the Secret Gospel is a legitimate proto-Christian or Christian text.^[25]

[edit] Interpretation of *Secret Mark*

According to N. T. Wright most scholars who accept the text as genuine see in the Secret Gospel of Mark a considerably later gnostic adaptation of Mark in a gnostic direction.^[26] F. F. Bruce sees the story of the young man of Bethany clumsily based on the raising of Lazarus in the Gospel of John and evidently no independent parallel or even source to this story.^[27]

[edit] Baptismal significance

Until recently, the opinion has been very common that the raising of the young man, portrayed in Secret Mark, has primarily a baptismal significance, as a sort of a 'baptism of initiation.' This was the opinion that Smith himself originally proposed.^[28] Along these lines, the statement "Jesus taught him the mystery of the kingdom of God" was typically read as a reference to the rites of [baptism](#).

But recently, there has been some debate about this matter. For example, [Scott G. Brown](#) (while defending the authenticity of Secret Mark) disagrees with Smith that the scene is a reference to baptism. Thus, he says, "[T]here is no mention of water or depiction of a baptism."^[29] He adds that "...the young man's linen sheet has baptismal connotations, but the text discourages every attempt to perceive Jesus literally baptizing him."^[30] S. Carlson seems to agree with Brown.^[31] The idea that Jesus practiced baptism is absent from the synoptic gospels, though it is introduced in the [Gospel of John](#).^[32]

According to Brown, for Clement, "the mystery of the kingdom of God" meant primarily "advanced theological instruction."^[33] These matters have a bearing on the debates about the authenticity of Secret Mark, because Brown clearly implies that Smith, himself, did not quite understand his own discovery.^[34] Still, it may be pointed out that the placement of this incident within the chronology of the [Gospel of Mark](#), i.e., just before the Passover celebrations, can imply some baptismal significance; the week before Easter/Passover is the preferred time for Christian baptism ceremonies.

[edit] Other interpretations

Scholar John Dart has proposed a complex theory of 'chiasms' (or 'chiasmus') running through the [Gospel of Mark](#) -- a type of literary devices he finds in the text.^[35] "He recovers a formal structure to original Mark containing five major chiastic spans framed by a prologue and a conclusion."^[36] According to Dart, his analysis supports the authenticity of Secret Mark.

In 2008, extensive correspondence between Smith and his teacher and lifelong friend [Gershom Scholem](#) was published, where they discuss Mar Saba MS over many years.^[37] The book's editor, Guy Stroumsa, argues that Smith could not have forged the MS, because these letters "show him discussing the material with Scholem, over time, in ways that clearly reflect a process of discovery and reflection."^[38] Those letters can be interpreted differently. Smith wrote in 1948 that he was working on the early Fathers, "especially

Clement of Alexandria" (p.28). In 1955 Smith wrote that he was at work on a chapter "for a book on Mark" (p.81). Later in 1955 Smith writes of "my book on Mark." (p.85)

Nov/Dec 2009 issue of [Biblical Archaeology Review](#) (BAR 35:06) features a selection of articles dedicated to the Secret Gospel of Mark. It includes articles by [Charles W. Hedrick](#)^[39], [Hershel Shanks](#), and [Helmut Koester](#). Generally, they are supportive of the authenticity of Mar Saba Ms.

[\[edit\]](#) The placement of the story within canonical Mark

If what is portrayed in Secret Mark is indeed a baptism, then the placement of this story within the canonical Mark is highly significant. What precedes the story is the third prediction of the Passion/Crucifixion (Mark 10:32-34). And what follows next is the story of the Sons of Zebedee (Mark 10:35-45), where baptism is mentioned explicitly. James and John ask Christ for positions of higher honor once Jesus is an earthly ruler. Jesus responds,

"You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or to be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized?" (Mark 10:38)

Here baptism is clearly seen as a symbol of Jesus' coming crucifixion, and this is widely accepted by Christian commentators.^[40] This understanding of baptism seems to be based on the teachings of Paul, according to whom, those who "were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death" (Romans 6:3). Among the Synoptic gospels, only Mark mentions baptism in this passage;^[41] thus the interests of the author of Secret Mark parallel those of the author of Mark, which also parallel the teachings of Paul.

[\[edit\]](#) Smith's theories about the historical Jesus

In his later work, Morton Smith increasingly came to see the historical Jesus as practicing some type of magical rituals and hypnotism, thus explaining various healings of demoniacs in the gospels.^[42] Smith seems to have developed his "libertine" understanding of Jesus starting from about 1967.^[43] He carefully explored for any traces of a "libertine tradition" in early Christianity, and in the New Testament.^[44] Yet there's very little in the Mar Saba MS to give backing to any of this. This is illustrated by the fact that Smith devoted only 12 lines to Mar Saba MS in his book *Jesus the Magician*.^[45]

[edit] See also

- [Mar Saba letter](#)
- [Morton Smith](#)

[edit] Notes

1. [^] Thiessen and Merz, *The Historical Jesus: A Comprehensive Guide*, 1998, p. 46.
2. [^] [a b c d](#) [Smith's own translation of the MS](#), as supplied by Mr. Wieland Willker
3. [^] [Wesley's Notes on the Bible](#)
4. [^] Lane, *The Gospel of Mark, New International Commentary on the New Testament*, 1974, pp. 527-28 (in reference to Mark 14:27).
5. [^] Helmut Koester, *Ancient Christian Gospels*, Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press, 1990, pp. 293-303 ([quotes available online](#))
6. [^] [Secret Mark at earlychristianwritings.com](#), including citations from Helmut Koester, *Ancient Christian Gospels* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press 1990), pp. 293-303, and Ron Cameron, ed., *The Other Gospels: Non-Canonical Gospel Texts*, Philadelphia, PA: The Westminster Press 1982, pp. 67-71
7. [^] D. Crossan, *Four Other Gospels: Shadows on the Contours of Canon*, Minneapolis, 1985, p. 108
8. [^] M. Smith, *Clement of Alexandria and Secret Mark: The Score at the End of the First Decade*, Harvard Theological Review 75 (1982) 449 - 461 ([here is a quote from this article](#))
9. [^] Steinfels, "Was It a Hoax? Debate on a 'Secret Mark' Gospel Resumes," *New York Times*, March 31, 2007.
10. [^] [a b](#) [Afterword from The Dawn Horse Press \(PDF file\)](#)
11. [^] Charles W. Hedrick and Nikolaos Olympiou, *Secret Mark*, in The Fourth R 13:5 (2000): 3-11, 14-16. Contains color plates of the manuscript. ([Available on-line.](#))
12. [^] S. Carlson, *The Gospel Hoax*, Baylor, 2005, p. 2
13. [^] Ehrman, *Lost Christianities*, 2005, pp. 83-84.
14. [^] [a b](#) Bethune, "Mark's Secret Gospel: What Does a Contested Text Say About Jesus, Gay Sex and Baptism?", *Maclean's*, May 12, 2005. [available online](#)
15. [^] S. Carlson, *The Gospel Hoax*, Baylor, 2005
16. [^] S. Carlson, *The Gospel Hoax*, Baylor, 2005, p. 28
17. [^] S. Carlson, *The Gospel Hoax*, Baylor, 2005, pp. 46-47
18. [^] e.g. Pantuck, Allan J.; Brown, Scott G. *Morton Smith as M. Madiotes: Stephen Carlson's Attribution of Secret Mark to a Bald Swindler*. Journal for the Study of the Historical Jesus, Volume 6, Number 1, 2008, pp. 106-125(20)

19. ^ Philip Jenkins. *Hidden Gospels: How the Search for Jesus Lost Its Way*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2001. 260 pages.
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22. ^ Robert M. Price, *Second Thoughts on the Secret Gospel* [available online](#) (access date 28 Feb 2009)
23. ^ Peter Jeffery, *The Secret Gospel of Mark Unveiled: Imagined Rituals of Sex, Death, and Madness in a Biblical Forgery*. Yale University Press, 2007 [ISBN 0300117604](#)
24. ^ A review of Jeffery's book by W. V. Harris, where these accusations are dismissed; Times Literary Supplement, October 19, 2007 [available online](#) (access date 28 Feb 2009)
25. ^ See the discussion in Grafton, "Gospel Secrets: The Biblical Controversies of Morton Smith," *The Nation*, January 26, 2009. Grafton refers to the book *Morton Smith and Gershom Scholem, Correspondence 1945-1982*, 2008.
26. ^ Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, 1996, p. 49.
27. ^ Bruce, "The 'Secret' Gospel of Mark," 1974.
28. ^ "Smith is able to arrive "at a definition of 'the mystery of the kingdom of God': It was a baptism administered by Jesus to chosen disciples, singly, and by night. In this baptism the disciple was united with Jesus. The union may have been physical...." [Review of Smith by Paul J. Achtemeier](#)
29. ^ Scott G. Brown, *Mark's Other Gospel*, Wilfrid Laurier, 2005, p. 145
30. ^ Scott G. Brown, *Mark's Other Gospel*, Wilfrid Laurier, 2005, p. 146
31. ^ S. Carlson, *Reply to Scott Brown*, The Expository Times, Vol. 117, No. 5, 185-188 (2006)
32. ^ John 3:22 ("After this Jesus and his disciples went into the Judean countryside, and he spent some time there with them and baptized."), 4:1 ("Now when Jesus learned that the Pharisees had heard, 'Jesus is making and baptizing more disciples than John'"). But the verse immediately following this, John 4:2 has this parenthetical note: "—although it was not Jesus himself but his disciples who baptized—"
33. ^ "...the audience of the longer Gospel is not catechumens who are preparing for baptism but baptized Christians involved in advanced theological instruction, the goal of which is gnosis." Scott G. Brown, THE SECRET GOSPEL OF MARK UNVEILED, RBL 09/2007 [available online \(PDF file\)](#)

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- [Price, Robert M. "Second Thoughts on the Secret Gospel."](#) Robert M. Price Web site
- [Robinson, B.A. "The 'Secret Gospel of Mark': What happened to the copy of Clement's letter?"](#) ReligiousTolerance.org - Contains text of the Clementine letter, with several translations

The Secret Gospel of Mark

I find the Secret Gospel of Mark fascinating. Copied by a scribe in the 18th century from an earlier (how early we don't know) copy, there has been a great deal of controversy among scholars regarding its authenticity. I believe the Clementine letter is authentic for reasons of style. There can be no justifiable suspicion of Morton Smith's integrity and I give no airing time to claims that Professor Smith forged the document..period!



Beginning of three-page handwritten addition penned into the endpapers of a printed book, Isaac Voss' 1646 edition of the Epistolae genuinae S. Ignatii Martyris. The addition is in 18th century Greek minuscule copying a letter of Clement of Alexandria "to Theodore" concerning a dispute with the Carpocratians, an heterodox Christian sect. It was discovered by Morton Smith in 1958 when he, as a graduate student of Columbia University, was cataloguing the manuscript collection of the Mar Saba Monastery south of Jerusalem.

Click on thumbnails to enlarge



Page 1

Translation of Andrew Bernhard (his website listed below)

01 From the letters of the most holy Clement of the Stomateis. To Theodore:

02 You did well silencing the unspeakable teachings of the Carpocratians.

03 For they are the prophesied wandering stars. From the narrow road of the commandments

04 they are wandering into a boundless abyss of carnal and bodily sins.

05 For having been puffed up in knowledge - as they call it - of the depths of Satan, they fail to notice

06 that they are throwing themselves down into the darkness of dark lies. And having boasted

07 that they are free, they have become slaves of servile desires. With these people, then, it is

08 necessary to check them constantly and in everything. For even if they say something true, still

09 the lover of the truth should not agree with them. For not all true things are truth.

10 One must not value what human opinion considers truth more than the

11 true truth, which is recognized through faith. Now, concerning their babblings about the divinely

12 inspired Gospel according to Mark: some are wholly false while others, even if partly true,

13 are still not completely true. The true parts, because they have been mixed

14 with invented stories are debased so that, as the saying goes, even the

15 salt loses its flavor. As for Mark then, during the time when Peter was in Rome,

16 he wrote up the deeds of the Lord, not actually recording everything, nor

17 hinting at the mysteries, but instead picking out the things he thought would

18 increase the faith of those being taught. Then, when Peter was martyred, Mark went

19 to Alexandria, bringing both his knowledge and the things he remembered hearing from Peter.

20 From what he brought, he supplemented his first book with the appropriate items

21 about knowledge for those who are making progress. He arranged a more spiritual

22 gospel for the use of those being perfected. Nevertheless, he did not reveal the things

23 which are not to be discussed. He did not write out the hierophantic

instruction of the

24 Lord, but added other deeds to the ones he had already written.

Then, he

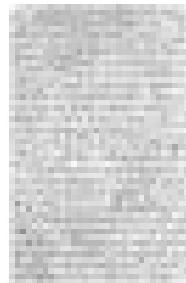
25 added certain sayings, the interpretation of which he knew would initiate the hearers

26 into the innermost sanctuary of the truth which has been hidden seven times. This is the way

27 he prepared them, in my opinion, not ungrudgingly or unguardedly.

And

28 when he died, he left his writing to the church in



Page 2

01 Alexandria, where it is even now still extremely carefully guarded, being read

02 only to those who have been initiated into the greatest mysteries.

The miserable

03 demons, however, are always devising destruction for the human race.

04 After being taught by them and using their deceptive arts, Carpocrates

05 was able to enslave some elder from the church in Alexandria

06 and get the written part of the secret gospel from him. And he

07 interpreted it according to his blasphemous and carnal opinion. Still

08 he defiles it, mixing with the most undefiled and holy narratives the most

09 shameless lies. The teaching of the Carpocratians is derived from this mixture.

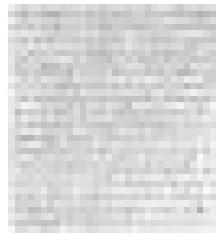
10 Therefore, one must never yield to them, just as I said before. Also, one must not concede

11 to them that the secret gospel is from Mark, when they put forth their lies.

12 Rather one must deny it, even with an oath. For one does not have to speak

13 the whole truth to everyone. For this reason the wisdom of God

declares through Solomon,
14 "Answer the fool from his folly," teaching that, from people whose minds are blinded,
15 the light of the truth must be concealed. At once, she (Wisdom) 16 says, "From the one who has not, it will be taken," and, "Let the fool go in darkness."
17 But we are the children of light, who have been illuminated in the rising of the heights of the
18 spirit of the Lord. "Where the spirit of the Lord is," she says, "there is freedom." For all
19 things are pure to those who are pure. So I will not hesitate to answer the questions for you,
20 exposing their lies from the actual words of the gospel.
21 At any rate, after the part, "They were going up on the road to Jerusalem" and the following things
22 until, "after three days he will arise," it takes up according to the text:
23 ***"And they went to Bethany and there was a woman whose brother had died.***
24 And coming up to him, she prostrated herself before Jesus and said to him, 'Son of David,
25 have mercy on me.' But the disciples rebuked her. And becoming angry,
26 Jesus went with her to the garden where the tomb was. And



Page 3

01 immediately a great sound was heard from the tomb, and Jesus, going toward it
02 rolled away the stone from the entrance to the tomb. And going in immediately where
03 the young man was, he stretched out a hand and raised him up, holding
04 his hand. Then, the man looked at him and loved him and
05 he began to call him to his side, that he might be with him. And going from
06 the tomb, they went to the house of the young man. For he

was rich. And after

07 six days, Jesus instructed him. And when it was late, the young man went

08 to him. He had put a linen around his naked body, and

09 he remained with him through that night. For Jesus taught him

10 the mystery of the kingdom of God. After he got up from there,

11 he turned to the region of the Jordan." And after these things, this follows:

12 "James and John go to him," and that whole section.

13 But the "naked man with naked man" and the other things you wrote about are

14 not found. After, "and he goes to Jericho," it adds only, "**And the 15 brother of the young man whom Jesus loved was there, as well as**

16 his mother and Salome. And Jesus did not welcome them."

17 But the many other things which you wrote both seem, and are, most false. So,

18 the truth according to the right interpretation. . .

Matthew 3:13 Then cometh Jesus from Galilee to Jordan, unto John, to be baptised by him.

<http://www.historian.net/step5.html>

The northern territory of Galilee consisted of a heavy mixture of Gentiles and Jews. Its rich soils and valleys made it the richest farming district in the province. The cities of the Galilee were very Hellenized while the Jewish population was centered in the rural farms and villages.

Many of Jesus sayings and aphorisms recall the imagery of the farming community of his childhood such as the "sowing and reaping" metaphors. It was the custom of villagers of the Galilee to join in the harvests to make extra income. Whether it be the "lilies of the fields" or the sparrows who neather "reap nor sow," Jesus' teachings paint a vivid picture of this agrarian rural community. Galileans were generally looked down upon by Judeans much like the people of rural farming communities in the American South by industrial northerners. The Aramaic dialect of Galileans was also noticeable by Judeans and another subject of derision. Galileans had a tendency to "drop their alefs" similar to the manner of dropping H's in Cockney English. This tendency is preserved in the Latinization of the name of Jesus' friend Alazar whom Jesus probably called 'Lazar, hence "Lazarus." (Photo. Jack Kilmon)

Mark 1:9 And it came to pass in those days, that Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee, and was baptised of John in the Jordan.

The Jordan River flows south from Lake Gennasaret to the Dead Sea. It was here that John the Baptist performed his baptisms as an act of ritual purity to call the people to repent for the imminent coming of God's rule. The association of John with the Jordan may have had a connection with the connection recognized by his followers with Elijah (see II Kings 2) and John's habit of clothing himself like Elijah (II Kings 1:8; Mt. 3:4; Mk 1:6). It was here that Jesus came to be baptised by John. (photo. Jack Kilmon)

Matthew 4:1 Then was Jesus led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil.

Matthew 4:8 -4:10 Again, the devil taketh him up into an exceeding high mountain, and sheweth him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them; And said unto him, all these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me. Then said Jesus unto him, Get thee hence, Satan: for it is written, thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and Him only shalt thou serve.

Tradition places the site of Jesus' temptation at "the Mount of Qarantel" near old Jericho. The summit of this mountain is thought to be the site of the last temptation and a cave on its eastern slope where Jesus fasted. A church was built over the cave in the 6th century and continuously occupied until deserted in the 13th century. There is now a Greek Orthodox church on the site.
(Photo. *"The Holy Land in Color"* Sami Awwad)

Matthew 1:21 And they went into Capernaum; and straightway on the Sabbath day He entered into the synagogue and taught.

As Nazareth was the home of Jesus during his childhood and young adulthood, Capernaum (K'far Nahum) can be considered the home of Jesus during his ministerial activities. The Gospels make it clear that Jesus as the prophesied Bar Nash was not accepted by those with whom he grew up. He launched his ministry in the synagogue at Nazareth by reading the scroll of Isaiah and claiming that he was the fulfillment of the prophecy (Luke 4: 16-30). After this incident, Jesus left Nazareth and went to Capernaum. It is very possible that Jesus had spent time in Capernaum during his childhood. His uncle Zebedee (Zebedee) owned a rather lucrative

fishering business there in partnership with Jonah, the father of Simon Peter and Andrew. Zebedee's own two sons, Ya'akov and Yohanon (James, the "greater" and John) also worked in this business. Two other cousins of Jesus, Mattityahu (Matthew) and Ya'akov (James, the "less"), the sons of Alphaeus/Clopas (brother of Jesus' father Joseph) also resided at Capernaum. The village lies on the northwestern shore of Lake Gennesaret. It was a bustling fishing port as well as a toll collecting station on the caravan route from Damascus to the Mediterranean coast. The picture above is one of the excavated 1st century main streets through the city upon which Jesus would have walked (Photo. Jack Kilmon).

Mark 2:1-5 And again he entered into Capernaum after some days, and it was noised that he was in the house. And straightway many were gathered together, insomuch as there was no room to receive them, no, not so much as about the door: and he preached the word unto them. And they come unto him, bringing one sick of the palsy, which was borne of four. And when they could not come nigh unto him because of the press, they uncovered the roof where he was; and when they had broken it up, they lay down the bed wherein the sick of the palsy lay. When Jesus saw their faith, he said unto the sick of the palsy, Son, thy sins be forgiven thee.

The residential section of the ancient town of Capernaum was excavated under the direction of Virgilio Corbo in 1968. These private houses (Insula II) lie between two parallel east to west streets and a broader street ("main street") between them. The houses are arranged around courtyards where ovens and grinding stones indicate bread was made. The walls of the houses are of the typical black basalt that is characteristic of the area. Mortared with mud and pebbles, the houses were one story with stairways that led to the roofs. It was in just such a house where the

healing incident of Mark 2:1-5 had taken place. (Photo. Jack Kilmon)

Mark 1:23-24 And there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit, and he cried out, saying "Let us alone; what have we to do with thee, thou Jesus of Nazareth? Art thou come to destroy us? I know thee, who thou art, the Holy One of God."

Luke 7:1-5 Now when he had ended all his sayings in the audience of the people, he entered into Capernaum and a certain centurion's servant, who was dear unto him, was sick and ready to die. And when he heard of Jesus, he sent unto him the elders of the Jews, beseeching Him that He would come and heal his servant. And when the came to Jesus, they besought him instantly, saying, that he was worthy for whom he should do this: for he loveth out nation, and he hath built us a synagogue.

The synagogue at Capernaum was excavated in 1905 by the *Deutsche Orient-Gesellschaft* by Heinrich Kohl and Carl Watzinger and continued to 1921 by the Franciscans. The present ruins are of a synagogue built on the site of the one Jesus knew in the late 2nd or early 3rd centuries. Continuing excavations by Vergilio Corbo has unearthed the underlying stratum and walls of the synagogue built by the centurion in Jesus' time. (Photo. Jack Kilmon)

John 2: 13-16 And the Jew's Passover was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem and found in the temple those that sold oxen and sheep and doves, and the changers of money sitting; and when he had made a scourge of small cords, he drove them all out of the temple, and the sheep, and the oxen; and poured out the

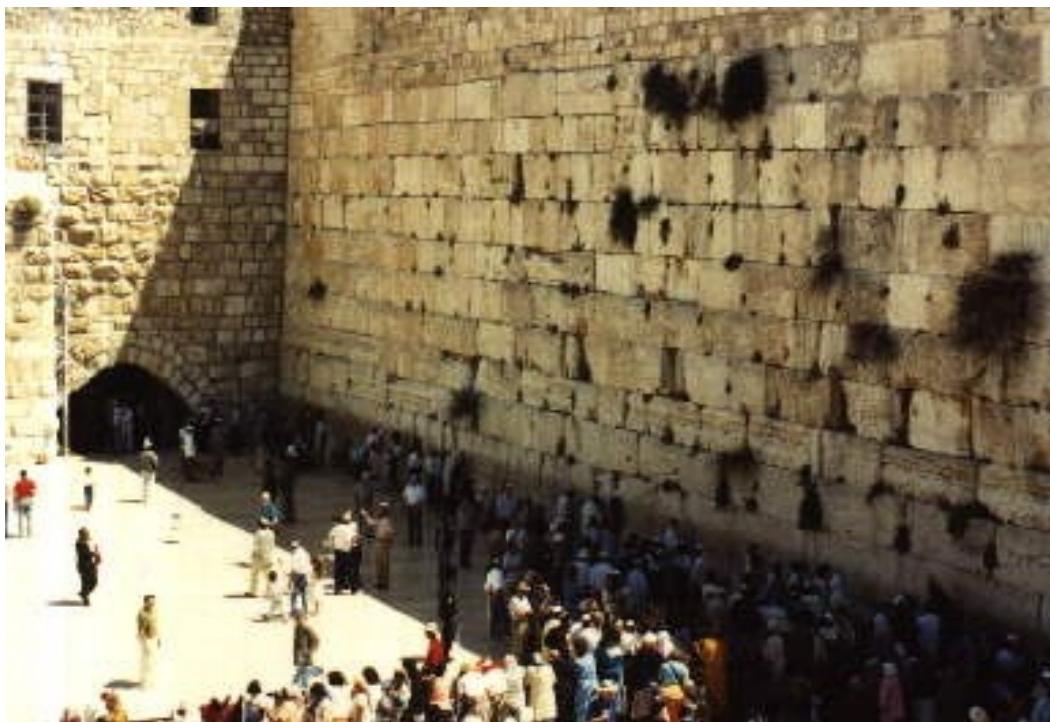
changers' money, and overthrew the tables; and said unto them that sold doves, take these things hence, make not my Father's house a house of merchandise.

Joseph Caiaphas had been appointed High Priest under the procuratorship of Valerius Gratus in 18 CE. It is significant to me that he served in this capacity for 18 years until 36 CE. when Pilate himself was recalled, coinciding with the downfall and trial of Sejanus. High Priests came and went like the husbands of some movie stars, rarely serving more than 3 years. Caiaphas had probably worked out a good relationship with Valerius Gratus, Pilate's predecessor, who himself served for eleven years in contrast to the normal 3 year terms of service. I do not believe that it is a coincidence that the unprecedented long terms of Gratus, Pilatus and Caiaphas coincide with the career of Lucius Aelias Sejanus. Judea may not have been considered a "plum" appointment because of the harsh surroundings but the opportunity for accumulating fortunes from graft and corruption was high. It is obvious that Caiaphas was "their man" in the Temple with access to the treasury as head of the party of the Sadducees and to all of the ancillary trade and commercial enterprises that surrounded the Temple. There were somewhere between 300,000 to 400,000 pilgrims in Jerusalem and surrounding areas for the temple services of Passover, each carrying a purse. Money changing, the selling of sacrificial animals, the money coming to the treasury from Jews all over the Roman world and hundreds of enterprises associated with the Temple were all being siphoned to enrich Sejanus, the prefect and the High Priest and his Sadducee cronies beyond the dreams of avarice. When Jesus entered the Temple early in the year 30 and condemned these practices, overturning money changers' tables, it sealed his death warrant. Joseph Caiaphas, as High Priest and head of the collaborating Sadducees, who controlled these commercial enterprises, had a great thing going for

himself and his Roman cronies, Gratus and Sejanus in Rome and later Pilatus and Sejanus.

Matthew 24:1-2 Jesus left and was going away from the temple when his disciples came to him to show him the temple's buildings. "Yes, " he said, "You may well look at all these. I tell you this: not a single stone here will be left in its place; every one of them will be thrown down.

When Jerusalem was captured by the Romans in 70 AD, nearly the entire city and the temple was raised to the ground by the Tenth Legion (Fretensis) under Vespasian. Jesus' prophecy had come true. Excavations, continuously ongoing on the temple mount have cleared away a lot of the debris of the destruction to reveal some of the ruins of the 2nd temple period. All that remains of Herod's temple is the Western Wall, now the holiest site for orthodox Jews. (Photo. Jack Kilmon)



**Josephus, the Jewish historian, describes the foundations of Herod's temple in *War v 5.1.189; Ant. Xv 11.1.392; and War v.5.6.224*. Seven courses of this Herodian masonry now exists above ground at the Western Wall, formerly known as the "Wailing Wall.."
Underground may be as much as 19 courses. Above these levels of Herod's temple are four courses of masonry from the Roman and Byzantine period and above those are the courses of masonry from the Turkish period. Those intial seven courses are the blocks of stone upon which Jesus' eyes would have set.
(Photo. Jack Kilmon)**



Josephus also describes, in *Ant. Xv.11.5.417* and in *War v.5.2.194*, the warning inscriptions on the stone balustrade of Herod's temple. These inscriptions were warnings to foreigners (Gentiles) that they could go no

further on penalty of death. In 1938, during the excavation around St. Stephan's Gate, a fragment of the inscription that survived the Roman destruction was found.

The Greek inscription, restored, was:

No foreigner is to enter within the balustrade and enclosure around the temple area. Whoever is caught will have himself to blame for his death which will follow.

This is the very inscription that Jesus saw when he entered the temple. (Photo. Palestine Archaeological Museum)



John 5:1-8 After this, there was a Jewish religious feast, and Jesus went to Jerusalem. There is in Jerusalem, by the Sheep Gate, a pool with five porches; in the Hebrew language it is called Bethzatha. A large crowd of sick people were lying on the porches, the blind, the lame and the paralyzed. They were waiting for the water to move because every now and then an angel of the Lord

went down into the pool and stirred up the water. The first sick person to go into the water after the water was stirred up was healed from whatever disease he had. A man was there who had been sick for thirty eight years. Jesus saw him lying there, and he knew that the man had been sick for such a long time; so he said to him, "Do you want to get well?" The sick man answered, "Sir, I don't have anyone to put me in the pool when the water is stirred up; while I am trying to get in, somebody else gets there first." Jesus said to him, "Get up, pick up your mat and walk." Immediately, the man got well; he picked up his mat, and walked.

Modern excavations began at the Pool of Bethesda in 1878 by the White Fathers. Further work was done on behalf of the White Fathers by J.-M. Rousee and R. de Vaux (of Qumran fame) in 1957-1962. The association of the pool with healing continued through the Roman period. This is a location that Jesus frequently used to conduct healings. (Photo. Jack Kilmon)

Matthew 26: 36-38 Then cometh Jesus with them to a place called Gethsemane, and saith unto the disciples, "Sit ye here while I go and pray yonder." And he took with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and began to be sorrowful and very heavy.

The Garden of Gethsemane lies on the eastern slope of the Mount of Olives and in Jesus' time had an olive press for making the oil from the abundant olive trees that grew here. It was apparently a favorite place for Jesus to pray away from the city. It is one of the sites, familiar to Jesus, that remains today much as it was in his time, perhaps with the very same olive trees. There are eight olive trees in the garden which some botanists claim to be 3,000 years old. It is here within the shadow of this very olive tree where Jesus was arrested by temple

guards and taken to the house of Caiaphas. (Photo. Jack Kilmon)

Matthew 27:33-37 *And when they were come unto a place called Golgotha, that is to say, a place of the skull. They gave him vinegar to drink, mixed with gall; and when he had tasted thereof, he would not drink. And they crucified, and parted his garments, casting lots: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, They parted my garments among them, and upon my vesture did they cast lots. And sitting down, they watched him there, and set up over his head his accusation, written: THIS IS JESUS, THE KING OF THE JEWS.*

The Hill of Golgotha still resembles a grinning skull. It is my opinion that the site known as "Gordon's Cavalry" is the actual site of the crucifixion which lies near a 1st century tomb in what was once a garden and villa, probably that of Joseph of Arimathea.

The traditional site in what is now the Church of the Holy Sepuchre was chosen from a dream by the Emperor Constantine's Christian mother, Helena. I find it hard to believe that the tomb of an important member of the Sanhedrin would be within yards of a popular site of execution. (Photo. Jack Kilmon)

Matthew 27:57-61 *When the even was come, there came a rich man of Arimathea, named Joseph, who also himself was Jesus' disciple: He went to Pilate, and begged the body of Jesus. Then Pilate commanded the body to be delivered. And when Joseph had taken the body, he wrapped it in a clean linen cloth, and laid it in his new tomb, which he had hewn out in the rock: and he rolled a great stone to the door of the sepulchre, and departed. And there was Mary Magdalene, and the other Mary, sitting over against the sepulchre.*

Just northwest of Golgotha lies the "Garden Tomb" in what was an ancient villa and garden. Sir Flinders Petrie, in 1937, confirmed that it was a Jewish tomb of the Herodian period. There is evidence of a later Christian baptistry in front of the tomb and the carving of an anchor, an early Jewish Christian symbol, on its facing. The "Garden Tomb" complies with scripture and is a more likely candidate as the original tomb of Joseph of Arimathea where Jesus was buried. (Photo. Jack Kilmon)

Luke 24: 12 Then arose Peter and ran into the sepulchre, and stooping down, he beheld the linen clothes laid by themselves, and departed, wondering in himself at that which was come to pass.

The loculus (burial niche) of the Garden tomb shows evidence of having been hastily enlarged to fit someone of taller stature than whomever the tomb was originally intended.

The tomb adheres to a number of scriptural parameters which the traditional tomb does not. It is certainly a tomb befitting a wealthy Jew of the Herodian period (Mt. 27:57) and is hewn from rock (Mt. 27:60). It is in what was once a garden villa but still near a place of crucifixion (John 19:41). It must be possible to see the loculus from the outside (John 20:5) and it must permit several persons to stand inside (Luke 24:1-4). The loculus where the body lay should be low rather than elevated (as in the traditional tomb) to allow Peter's "stooping down" (Luke 24:12).



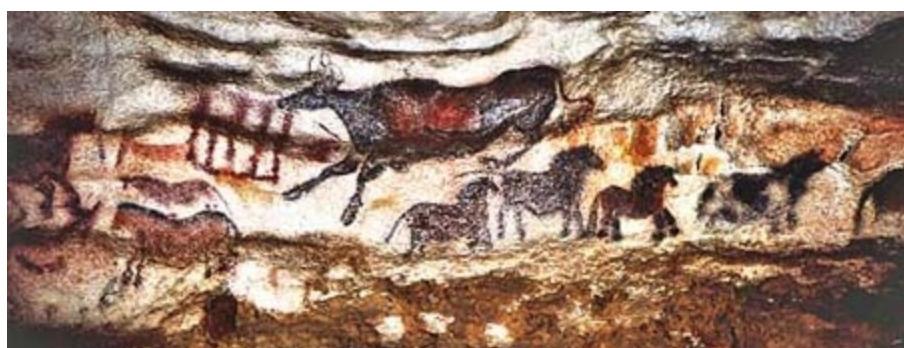
Luke 24: 50-51 Then he led them out of the city as far as Bethany, where he raised his hands and blessed them. As he was blessing them, he departed from them and was taken up into Heaven.

The Mosque of the Ascension lies atop the Mt. of Olives and is where Islamic tradition claims Jesus rose to Heaven. (Photo. Jack Kilmon)

ଶ୍ରୀମତୀ	କାଳେଶ୍ୱର	୨୧/୩୪୬	୫୩୧୯	AII
ଅମେରିକ୍ୟ	ଏବରାମେ	ASCDIE	abedies	
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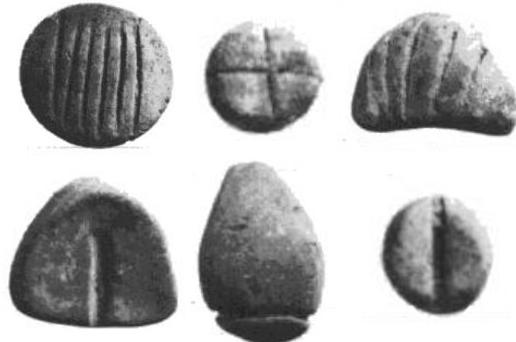
The History of Writing

Language existed long before writing, emerging probably simultaneously with sapience, abstract thought and the Genus Homo. In my opinion, the signature event that separated the emergence of palaeohumans from their anthropoid progenitors was not tool-making but a rudimentary oral communication that replaced the hoots and gestures still used by lower primates. The transfer of more complex information, ideas and concepts from one individual to another, or to a group, was the single most advantageous evolutionary adaptation for species preservation. As long ago as 25,000-30,000 years BP, humans were painting pictures on cave walls. Whether these pictures were telling a "story" or represented some type of "spirit house" or ritual exercise is not known.



The advent of a writing system, however, seems to coincide with the transition from hunter-gatherer societies to more permanent agrarian encampments when it became necessary to

count ones property, whether it be parcels of land, animals or measures of grain or to transfer that property to another individual or another settlement. We see the first evidence for this with incised "counting tokens" about 9,000 years ago in the neolithic fertile crescent.



Around 4100-3800 BCE, the tokens began to be symbols that could be impressed or inscribed in clay to represent a record of land, grain or cattle and a written language was beginning to develop. One of the earliest examples was found in the excavations of Uruk in Mesopotamia at a level representing the time of the crystallization of the Sumerian culture.



The pictures began as representing what they were, pictographs, and eventually, certain pictures represented an idea or concept, ideographs, and finally to represent sounds.



Eventually, the pictographs were stylized, rotated and in impressed in clay with a wedge shaped stylus to become the

script known as Cuneiform. The pictograph for woman, as seen above became .

Written language was the product of an agrarian society. These societies were centered around the cultivation of grain. A natural result of the cultivation and storage of grain is the production of beer. It is not surprising, therefore, that some of the very oldest written inscriptions concern the celebration of beer and the daily ration allotted to each citizen.

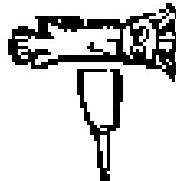


Early cylinder seal depicting beer production

It's tempting to claim that the development of a writing system was necessitated by the need to keep track of beer, but perhaps we can be satisfied that it was just part of it.

The signs of the Sumerians were adopted by the East Semitic peoples of Mesopotamia and Akkadian became the first Semitic language and would be used by the Babylonians and Assyrians. The Akkadian characters continued to represent syllables with defined vowels.

For the next step toward the development of an alphabet, we must go to Egypt where picture writing had developed sometime near the end of the 4th millennium BC. One of the earliest examples is the name of NAR-MER, either the first or second Pharaoh of an united Egypt in 3100 BCE. The name appears as two syllabic figures between the cows' heads on the Kings cosmetic pallete.



First glyph "Nar" (Egyptian "monster fish," "cuttle fish.")

Second glyph "Mar" is a pictograph of a drill or borer

Unlike Akkadian, the Egyptian syllabic system had no definitive vowels. Some hieroglyphs were biliteral, some triliteral. Others were determinatives that at the end of the word gave a sense of the word and others were idiographs. Eventually,

however, certain Egyptian hieroglyphs such as  **which was pronounced *r'i* meaning "mouth" became the pictograph for the sound of R with any vowel. The pictograph for "water"**

pronounced *nu*  became the symbol for the consonantal sound of N. This practice of using a pictograph to stand for the first sound in the word it stood for is called **acrophony** and was the first step in the development of an **ALPHABET** or the "One Sign-One sound" system of writing. The Egyptian consonants were:



A glottal stop similar to the Hebrew Alef



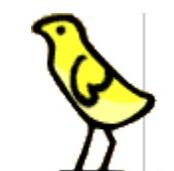
Consonantal Y like the Hebrew Yod



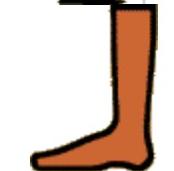
Sometimes abbreviated as \ \, sound of Y or ee used in the last syllable



Guttural sound corresponding to Hebrew Ayin



W or U, corresponds to Hebrew Waw



Sound of B



Sound of P



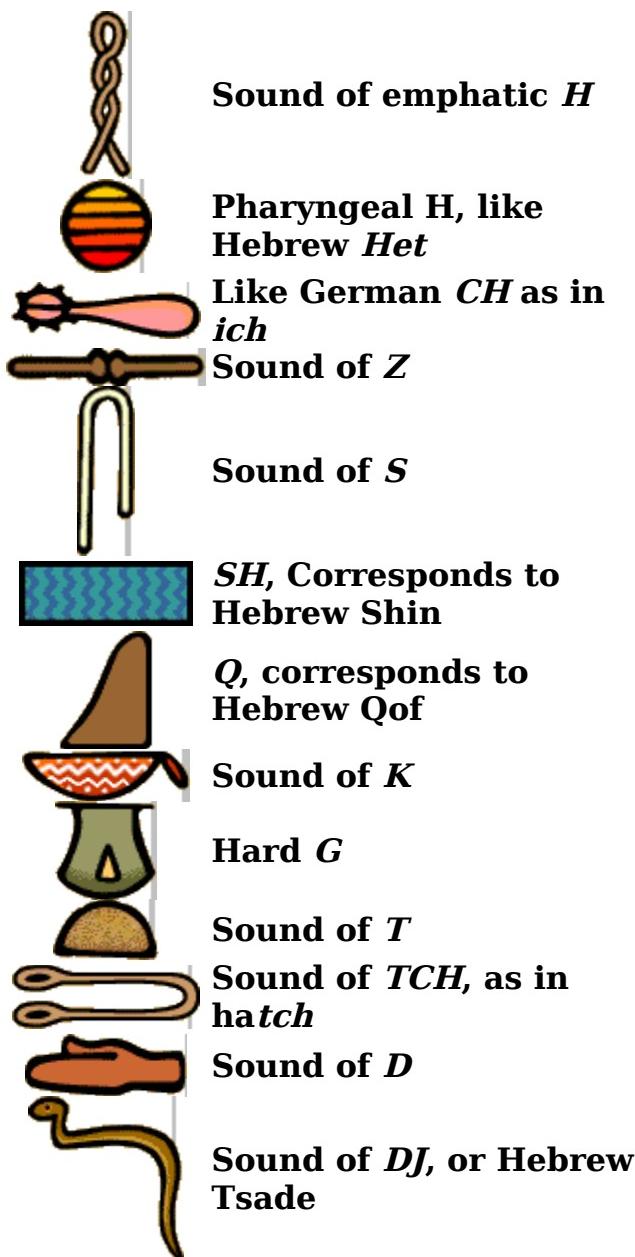
Sound of F



Sound of M

Sound of N

Sound of R

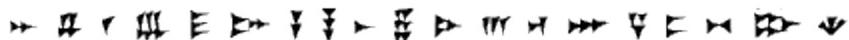


See banner below as source of hieroglyphs

The Egyptians used the acrophones as a consonantal system along with their syllabic and idiographic system, therefore the alphabet was not yet born. The acrophonic principle of Egyptian clearly influenced **Proto-Canaanite/Proto-Sinaitic** around 1700 BC. Inscriptions found at the site of the ancient turquoise mines at Serabit-al-Khadim in the Sinai use less than 30 signs, definite evidence of a consonantal alphabet rather than a syllabic system.

,		l	
b		m	
g		n	
d		s	
h		c	
w		p	
z		š	
ḥ		q	
t		r	
y		š	
k		t	

This is the alphabet that was the precursor to Phoenician, Greek and Roman. Meanwhile, in the North another experiment in a consonantal alphabet was taking place. Excavations of the ancient city of Ugarit, modern Ras Shamra, has produced texts in a cuneiform script that was also consonantal. In the order of the Alef-Beyt:



The Semitic languages diversified along geographic lines as Northwest Semitic, Northeast, Southwest and Southeast.

Northwest Semitic consists of 2 major groups, Aramaic and

Canaanite. Canaanite is represented by Ugaritic, Phoenician, and Hebrew. **Northeast Semitic** consists of the ancestral Akkadian, represented by Babylonian and Assyrian. The Southwest and Southeast Semitic languages consisted of North and South Arabic and Ethiopic.

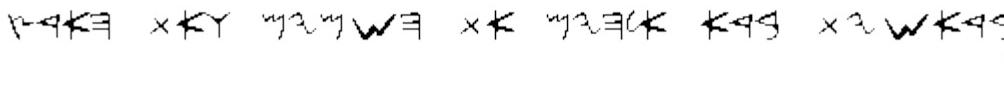
The term **epigraphy** is generally used for writing on hard durable materials such as stone or postsherds (**ostraca**) but some use the term for any inscriptional remnants of a past civilization.

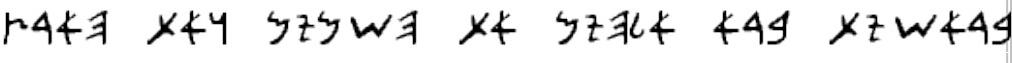
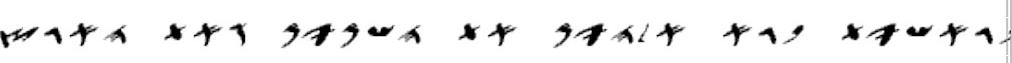
Palaeography is the study of the progressive changes and developments in the form of letters over time and is usually applied to writing on less durable materials such as parchment, leather or papyrus. An experienced palaeographer can often date a specific manuscript with fair accuracy. Epigraphy on stone is usually harder to date since more archaic forms were often retained for monumental inscriptions. The causes of changes in scripts were primarily sociological and psychological, a script hand being a reflection of styles and trends for particular time periods. Unfortunately, this is not measurable for the palaeographer whose primary tool is a systematic collection or database of thousands of exemplars of written material of known date.

Spelling and the sequence of characters in a word and their setting in a grammatic structure is the provenance of **Orthography**.

Using the fonts I have created for classroom work by my various scholar friends in the discussion lists, I have arranged the following inscriptions of Genesis 1:1 to display the development of the Semitic scripts since the 10th century BCE.

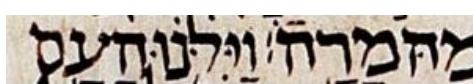
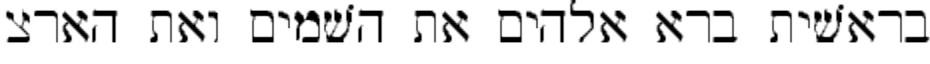
Archaic Scripts (click on font for download)

Old Phoenici an 10th- 9th cent. BCE	
Moabite 850 BCE	

Early Aramaic 800 BCE	
Siloam Inscripti on 700 BCE	
Samaritan *	
Lachish Ostraca 6th cent. BCE	

*Samaritan retained the use of the archaic script.

Aramaic Square Scripts

Elephantine Payrus 5th cent. BCE	
Nabataean Aramaic 1st cent. CE	
Great Isaiah Scroll 200-100 BCE	
Habakkuk Pesher 150-100 BCE	
Codex Leningradensis 1010 CE.	
Modern Hebrew	

The Phoenician Alphabet was adopted by the early Greeks who earned their place in alphabetic history by symbolizing the vowels. Therefore, the Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek scripts all came from the Phoenician. The Greek alphabet led to Latin and Cyrillic. Aramaic led to Arabic and most of the scripts used in India. The entire Western World became the inheritors of those beer drinkers in Mesopotamia and the turquoise miners in the Sinai.

Phoenician	𐤁 𐤂 𐤃 𐤄 𐤅 ߂ ߃ ߄ ߅ ߆ ߇ ߈ ߉ ߊ ߋ ߌ
Early Greek	Α Β Κ Ε Ζ Ι Υ Τ Χ Σ Η Μ Α Ν
Roman	Α Β Κ Ε Ζ Ι Υ Τ Χ Σ Η Μ Α Ν



Donald Ryan's [Ancient Languages and Scripts](#)

Like the Egyptian Hieroglyphs? Check out